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## V CORPS AVIATORS PUT LESSONS LEARNED IN IRAQ TO USE AT LIVE-FIRE TRAINING

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### GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA,

**Germany** — "We were part of the huge Karbala fight, and after that, we take this very seriously," he said, referring to a night battle on March 23, 2003 when the

squadron's aircraft came under intense enemy fire.

"That night really proved to all of us how important it was to be able to react quickly and know the systems on board."

In battle each Longbow crew must be able to maneuver the complex state-of-the-art aircraft well, track and acquire targets, and engage the enemy whether he is moving or standing still. Gunnery exercises gauge how



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*ABOVE:* An AH-64D Apache 'Longbow' attack helicopter from V Corps' 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry, 11th Aviation Regiment, prepares to fire at targets in the distance during a live-fire gunnery training exercise at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany. *BELOW:* In the range tower, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Todd O'Donnell, 6/6th range safety officer, watches rounds fired from one of the squadron's Apaches impact downrange during the exercise.



accurate and effective those skills are.

Pilots must qualify with the weapons on the Apache in the same way all Soldiers must continually prove their ability to handle an M-16 rifle, said Capt. Bryan Darilek, a 6/6th pilot and the squadron's Troop B platoon leader.

Darilek explained that pilots must successfully complete a minimum of two "table eights" each year, one during the day and one at night. To qualify, they must hit a certain number of targets with each weapon system. The targets are life-size silhouettes of enemy tanks and armored personnel carriers, the closest set at 800 meters from the aircraft and the farthest at between four and five kilometers away. One "run" on the range consists of three different rocket engagements, three 30mm gun engagements and six varied missile engagements with both stationary and moving targets.

Combat experience in Iraq has already changed the way the unit trains at home. Instead of having pilots take instruction from a controller in a range tower, the training now places pilots in a scenario where they talk to the tower team as if they were another helicopter or wing man.

"We've worked to create a very tactical feel, closer to what pilots would actually experience," said Capt. Jesse Flemming, the 6/6th's range tower officer for the exercise.

"It really helps you to get more into the exercise," said Darilek.

"This is the best training available short of actually going into combat," agreed Christensen.

After the pilots finish their gunnery tables, graders carefully appraise video recorded in the helicopters' cockpits and grade each table based on targets hit and the time it took the pilots to acquire and fire at those targets. Pilots also often take the time to sit and watch the tapes and talk with each other about what they can do to improve their performance, said Capt. Tim Jaeger, a 6/6th pilot and the unit's logistics officer.

"Everyone wants to do well," said Jaeger. "When it's time for qualifying, I'm confident that I'll do well, but there's still a little bit of nervousness. Talking out how things will work once we're in the cockpit helps things to run smoothly."

All the pilots agreed that they can never get too much practice, and said they feel it's their duty to pass the lessons they learned in Iraq on to new pilots.

"We have a lot of new pilots, and some of them are going through this for the first time with the unit. The new scenarios will help them learn our lessons from Iraq at the same time," said Jaeger. "We're all better aviators as a result of our experiences there."

